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ABSTRACT

Although "The Equalizer" and "Finder of Lost Loves" are different kinds of prime time fiction--urban thriller on the one hand and fantasy melodrama on the other--they share an underlying dramatic structure and symbolic problematic in their repeated enactments of a therapeutic cure overseen by a mediating, authority figure. The protagonists in both cases are engaged by clients under the alibi of offering investigative/detective services; and their ability and willingness to direct a therapeutic cure is determined in direct proportion to their own lack which is specifically delineated in the course of the programs. But the therapeutic problematic is not limited to domestic melodrama and fantasy productions: in "The Love Boat" and "Hotel," for example, the therapeutic process has been narrowly aligned with the economic and social power interests of a few main characters. The nature of the therapeutic process constructed/represented on television is complex and problematic, as an abstracted and multiform therapeutic ideology informs the narrative as a whole, while the association of individual characters with positions of authority/subordination varies. The multiplication of the therapeutic problematic within specific programs disperses the positions any single character or viewer may hold; fantasy turns in on itself where the underlying problematic involves finding one's place in a familial and social order. This process is exacerbated with the proliferation of therapeutic discourses through a range of television genres and programs. (20 end notes) (CGD)

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MEDIATING RELATIONS: Therapeutic Discourse in American Prime Time Series

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MEDIATING RELATIONS: Therapeutic Discourse in American Prime Time Series

I. The lure of a Story

"That was then; this is now." These words are spoken by Cary Maxwell (Tony Franciosa) during the denouement of an episode of Finder of Lost Loves, a television program that aired during the 1984-85 season on ABC. The logic of the statement--here cut loose from its dramatic context--results from a linguistic tautology, through the pairing and opposing of two sets of shifters, each linked by the transitivity of being: that/this, then/now, was/is. The syntagmatic realization is anchored by the association of a paradigm of distance-spatial, conceptual, and temporal: this now, is/that, then, was. One could not assert with equivalent force or certainty that, "That was now; this is then," or, "That is now; this was then." Thus the meaningfulness of the statement, its ability to make sense, is at once self-evident and self-contained, a logical postulate based in the linguistic code of the English language.

As linguistic tautology the assertion exerts a decidedly weak referentiality. It proposes itself as an instance of signification, a discourse, in search of a subjectivity. If Emile Benveniste's analysis of pronouns, verb forms, and shifters demonstrates the theoretical inseparability of language, discourse, and subjectivity,¹ a statement such as "that was then; this is now," reveals in full relief the amorphously unspecifiable logical limits of a subjectivity constructed in language. As a linguistic postulate, it represents a "truth" of discourse and subjectivity, an absolute law of being-as-meaning which is irrefutable in

the terms of the language in which it is formulated. Yet equally it implicates a subjectivity that is held by no one, or may be filled by any one.

That was then; this is now. The juxtaposition of discontinuous phrases at once signifies disjunction and conjunction; an unspecified relation, but a relation nonetheless, that can be "filled in" in a variety of ways. It constitutes the lure of a story--an invitation to narrative--which it also summarizes and subsumes. It is at once a code and a conclusion. In this sense it begs to be inserted within, elaborated and clarified by, the particularity of a narrative, a dramatic context. But what story do we tell? That was then; this is now--an imbrication of histoire and discours;² it is the story of history, of fairy tales, of psychoanalysis, of subjectivity. And indeed this assertion works to hold all of these possible narratives in balance, providing a meta-narrative key to the fantasy of therapy offered by the program in which it is spoken.

II. Finder of Lost Loves

The fiction of Finder of Lost Loves centers on Maxwell, Ltd., an agency whose function is to locate missing persons, those who have been loved and lost--former boyfriends, girlfriends, parents, children, spouse, and so forth. Or, as Daisy Lloyed explains to a friend in one episode, "we usually take cases involving people who are looking for people with whom they have a history." The agency was established by Cary Maxwell,

a former pilot, after his wife died at a tragically young age. He decided that while he could not have the one person or thing he loved the most, he could at least devote his life to helping others from having to go through what he perpetually suffers--terminal loss. Daisy is his associate and his sister-in-law, the younger sister of his deceased wife. Most episodes of the program involve two cases, one handled by Cary and the other by Daisy. They periodically exchange counsel and support as they each lead a client search, unite a client with a sought loved one, and oversee a period of predictably fraught reconciliation.

In the episode in question, Cary's case involves friends, two former fellow pilots. Thad comes to the agency to ask Cary to join him for the weekend to help Mike, who has let his personal and professional life deteriorate since the three of them stopped working together twelve years earlier; Thad has also arranged for Beth to join them, a woman who ran out on Mike on the eve of their marriage at the same time. Thad explains to Cary that Beth is the cause of Mike's problems, and that he has to get her out of his system before he can set his life back on track. "They don't belong together. They never did." In the course of this unforeseen reunion Mike and Beth discover that their feelings for one another are as strong as ever, though both fear they may be hurt once again. However Cary learns that it was Thad who engineered the original break-up, forging a "Dear Beth" letter in Mike's name, and then telling Mike that Beth ran off with another man.

This revelation disrupts the renewed relationship among the friends. In a fit of anger, Mike flies his crop-dusting plane perilously close

to Cary and Thad's care while they are driving down the road. Beth prepares to leave, explaining to Cary, we can understand his anger at Thad, But I can't understand why he finds it more important than the love we just found. Will you tell him goodbye?" When Cary suggests that she should speak to Mike directly, she refuses, "The twelve years I've been waiting have changed him too much." Cary and Thad find Mike in his hanger, and Mike and Thad begin to argue until Cary intervenes.³ Mike accuses Thad of costing him his marriage, but Cary interrupts, "That was then; this is now. She's always loved you Mike. Do you want to do something about that? Or stay in this rut you've dug yourself?"

Throughout this half of the episode, Cary serves as the figure of authority and stability to whom the others repeatedly turn. While Thad indicates the search that brings his "lost loves" together, Cary's presence is crucial for the transformative/restorative process to occur. It is Beth who first confesses to him that Mike jilted her twelve years earlier, and not vice versa. Cary's subsequent confrontation with Thad provokes an explanation of why he did it. Indeed as the program's constituted authority Cary demands an explanation. When Thad asks whether his reasons matter, Cary grabs him by the shoulders and firmly asserts, "This is me. It matters." As the figure who requires confessions and explanations, Cary is established as the mediator among the group of reunited friends. This turn of narrative events, the recovery of the "truth" of the past, also sheds new light on Thad's motives for bringing these people together in the first place. On the one hand he claims that he wants to help Mike "get over" Beth; at the same time, assembling this particular group of people for the

first time in twelve years is the best way to be sure that the truth will come out, that his role in Mike and Beth's separation will be revealed. It is also the best way to reunite Mike and Beth.

"That was then; this is now." In its most immediate context it refers to Thad's intervention in Mike and Beth's relationship. Thad cost Mike his marriage then--twelve years ago--but has reunited Mike and Beth now. In other works, the distress of the past has been remedied, and the present offers a terrain of positive potentiality. But this context is quickly generalized, and the possibilities for how we might understand the statement are thereby dispersed. "Do you want to do something about that? Or stay in this rut you've dug yourself." Now Mike is in a rut, suggesting that then he was not. Do you want to do something about that then, or stay in this rut now? Thus the values that can be ascribed to past and present, then and now, are reversed. An in some sense what Mike wants--expressed in his present anger towards Thad--is precisely to do something about that, about Thad's disruption of his marriage twelve years ago.

Mike's anger is justified, but temporally displaced, and this leads Beth to leave him just as she had twelve years before. As Cary notes, Mike has decided--now--that it is more important to blame Thad for his problems than it is to go on with his life. But Cary and Thad are there in the first place because he has been blaming Beth and has not been "going on" with his life. Instead he left a high paying, upwardly mobile career with an airline company to run a small business in the country. Cary and Thad are there to help him because he has let things slide. Thus "That was then; this is now" subsumes a complex knot of narrative and didactic repetition and reversals which cannot be easily or clearly disintricated. Yet whatever was then or is now the case, this particular story can conclude in a "happy end" as Beth and Mike are reunited, and Thad offers to arrange for Mike to be rehired by

the airline company.

The parallel story for this episode involves a minister, Evan, who is looking for an old girlfriend, Linda. They dated in high school and she got pregnant; they were kept apart by their parents and the child was given up for adoption. Several years later the adoptive parents died in an accident, and when the authorities were unable to locate the birth mother, Evan, then in divinity school, gained custody of his daughter Vicki. She is now a teenager and he feels she would profit from meeting her mother. Daisy finds Linda in San Francisco and learns that she is now a madam in a bordello and would prefer not to face Evan or her daughter. However, they have followed Daisy to San Francisco, owing to a lapse in the agency's usually discreet search procedures. (The agency tries to make sure that a sought person is willing to be "found" before revealing their whereabouts.) Evan discovers Linda's profession, and reluctantly consents to her meeting with Vicki when Linda promises to keep her profession a secret. But inevitably the truth comes out, and Vicki runs away to join her mother, though she eventually ends up reunited with her father.

Through a series of encounters, it is clear that Evan and Linda still feel strongly about each other, but Evan is distressed at the divergent paths their lives have taken. As he explains to Daisy, "I repented for my sins by becoming a minister; she's making a living out of hers." What he would like, he adds, is "to turn back the clock and undo the past." In a later scene Linda tells Daisy that she has tried to replace Evan "with hundreds of men." Her present lifestyle is implicitly defined as an effort to reconstitute her past, to find a replacement for Evan. In their parting scene, as Evan prepares to leave with Vicki, the irreconcilability of their present lives is underscored, in spite of their mutual desire to overcome the factors that obviate the possibility of renewed coupledness.⁴

In this episode the narrative situations and their resolutions are different but the problematic is the same: that was then; this is now. And in one case the mistakes of the past have led to irrevocable conclusions. The characters must reconcile themselves to incompleteness under the watchful eye of Daisy, who is second only to Cary as a confessional sounding board and mediator among estranged parties. In other words, and crucially, a reenounter does not inevitably assure renewed union, but is nonetheless a necessary context for some sort of conciliation. One must live the shadows of one's past, but must equally work through them, facing them in the light of day, so to speak. One's actions have enduring, if unpredictable consequences which must be confronted. Then and now, before and after: these are the boundaries within which objectivity is played but over and over again on Finder of Lost Loves, a renewed but variable process where the results are not given in advance.

"That was then; this is now," at first seems to be an incidental comment that pops up in the midst of all of this. But its efficacy and value lies in its virtual repetition, as it contains and subsumes relations--similarity and difference, conjunction and disjunction--enacted in dramatic confrontations among characters. It is a structuring motif of not just one story, one episode, but of the program as a whole. Indeed it is uttered more than once in the course of Finder of Lost Loves. In another episode Daisy takes the case of a former boyfriend, helping him to find a woman he claims he wants to marry. She discusses the case with Cary who advises against professional involvement when personal feelings are at stake. But Daisy persists, "He's looking for the woman he wants to marry. I think that makes it pretty clear where he's coming from." "Where are you coming from?" Cary asks, "I'm the one who wanted to break up," she replies. "That was then; this is now." And of course as she pursues this case the truth of Cary's words is fully exposed, as the search for and reunion with the woman

becomes the occasion for renewed affection between Daisy and her former boyfriend, culminating in a marriage proposal.

Far from incidental, the statement offers a terse formulation of the program's hermeneutic and symbolic codes,⁵ as episodes repeatedly involve encounters between individuals with figures from their past: "We usually take cases involving people who are looking for people with whom they have a history." According to the logic of the show, a dramatic confrontation has to take place. Circumstances and dates based on an unresolved past must be revived, renarrated, and reenacted to secure the terms of one's present emotional and familial (and less often), professional situation. This process does not occur through individual work, but is carried out under the auspices of Maxwell, Ltd. Cary and Daisy hear people's problems; help them to seek out hidden, missing, or lost aspects of their past; and oversee the psycho-dramas the inevitably erupt in the course of the confrontations they instigate.

If this trajectory sounds familiar perhaps it is because it evokes the narrative of therapy as constituted through psychoanalytic and psychological discourse. I use both qualifiers here because it is not strictly a Freudian tradition which is modelled in the show, but a more generalized therapeutic strategy which is engaged. Indeed therapy can be seen as the motive force of the program's narrative logic. Cary and Daisy are not merely detectives with expertise in locating missing persons, although this is the skill they presumably offer to clients. Indeed if they did not operate in the guise of detectives, many clients would not seek their services, since most of the clients do not recognize the need for therapy as such, but are looking for detective services of a personal and confidential nature. As detectives in disguise, Cary and Daisy's exceptional talent and function lie in their role as therapists as the narrative and temporal weight of each episode is concentrated on the reunions and negotiated reconciliations which they

oversee. Each subplot thus offers something on the order of a case history.

The analogy between the program's narratives and the process of therapy informs every stage of its episodic indiscretories. Clients are often awkward and embarrassed about going to Maxwell, Ltd., in the first place though they are inevitably reassured by the agency's discretion and the genuine concern expressed by Daisy and Cary for these situations. Yet even so, resistance figures prominently, as the inferred rationale for a given search is often revealed to be an alibi or a decoy. It rarely proves to be the case that clients simply "lie." Rather their motives are multiple and confused: they are too ashamed to tell the whole story, or fear the case will be rejected if they reveal the whole truth. In this way, the construction of the "problem"--a process of discovery and clarification--is frequently at issue as part of the cure.

For example in one episode a journalist, Robin Sloan, asks Daisy to help her locate a reclusive horse breeder, Maggie Singer, for a story she is researching. It turns out that Maggie had an affair with Robin's father many years earlier, an affair that the daughter betrayed to the mother, ruining her parents' marriage and her relationship with both parents. Her mother has recently died, and she now realizes that Maggie was the "true love" of her father's life, and not just any "other woman." Thus Robin's initial claim, that Maggie Singer touched her life in a profound way, is absolutely true, but not in the terms in which Daisy or the viewer first understood. Robin arranges for her father to reencounter Maggie as a way of compensating for previous familial disruption. But it is unclear whether she wants to witness a reunion to reenact the childhood trauma of discovering them together in order to reject them once again--an adult repetition to reconfirm her childhood betrayal; or if she hopes to reconstruct a "happy family" in the wake of her mother's death. In either case, and in every case that Maxwell, Ltd. takes on, the familial

problematic is of central concern as the family resolve is played out in multiple variations and in variable stages.

Cary and Daisy repeatedly guide client-patients from uncertainty based in an unresolved past to a present familial conciliation. This may involve full-blown reconciliation with the reformation of couples or parent-child ties that were broken in the past. But it may equally involve a resolution of confirmed separation, the recognition that former bonds and alliances are a part of one's past and no more than that. The process that confirms the result, a therapeutic process, is more crucial than the specific terms that constitute resolution, which are variable from case to case. The economic and temporal terms of the cure also vary on a case to case basis, depending on the means and needs of individual clients. The cost of services offered by Maxwell, Ltd. is rarely mentioned, except in situations where a potential client has only a limited fixed amount to spend. In such instances Cary usually tells them not to worry about the expense, though it is clear that all clients pay something. Similarly the length of the cure is subject to fluctuation, though it is always intensive and delimited. Two days or two weeks may be necessary to resolve a situation, but for the duration of each case, Cary, Daisy, and their clients devote most of their time and attention to working things out.

In some sense this instability constitutes Cary and Daisy as "radical" therapists, as the terms for economic and temporal exchange are not rigid or regular. But this is compensated by the situating of the program without regulation of network broadcast of the time televised, with the exception or preemption for rebroadcasting the program at the same time, on the same day, each week. Within this context commercial breaks might be taken as the regularity of economic support for each station. However, on this basis we cannot simply conclude that there is analogy of doctor to patient, Daisy and Cary to their clients, and television to its viewers.

Rather, if we are to take Finder of Lost Loves as a model for therapy, we have to recognize the complexity and confusion of identifications, and of doctor/patient relations, at the very core of the program. For it is not simply the case that Cary and Daisy function as lay-analysis to the string of clients who appear at the offices of Maxwell, Ltd. As mentioned before, Cary Maxwell started the company after his wife died. His cases manifest something on the order of a repetition compulsive reenactment of a scenario that will always remain incomplete for him even as his clients are less successful resolutions. His wife is dead and can never be found, or can only be found in the displaced figuration that each case represents. It is thus his lack that grounds the fulfillment of others, for were his wife still living Maxwell, Ltd. would not exist. The company name achieves its full significance in this context, its limitation being the impossibility of serving its founder. It bears, one is tempted to say, the Name of the Father which is constituted precisely in relation to the figure of the Absent Mother.

This absence is compensated in yet another displacement by Daisy, the sister-in-law. Daisy is not only an associate and confidant, but also a stand-in for her sister. Indeed, the relationship between Cary and Daisy, a continual unconsummated flirtation-romance, frequently stands as the "third" sub-plot in each episode. This relationship, perhaps more than any other, is the figuration of the problematic of repetition and difference at the heart of the program.

Cary's attraction to Daisy--the necessity of her presence and his compulsive inability to consummate the relationship--hinges on the symbolic force of the absent wife/mother. Daisy is associated with the absent wife through the genetic code of familial relations; but she is not her sister. To consummate the relation would be to supplant the wife, to transform her from an absent presence to an absent absence, or to successfully undergo the

cure in the same terms as Maxwell, Ltd.'s clients.⁶ Yet this would also obviate the function of the agency for its founder as the displacement-supplement for the absent wife (and, we might add, terminate the show).⁷ Daisy is thus, and necessarily, an inadequate substitute, and her presence as such brings into full relief the double and imbricated therapeutic problematic that underwrites the program as a whole.

The emphasis on the therapeutic model and the familial problematic is not inadvertent. While Finder of Lost Loves was only successful enough to stay on prime time television for one season, its strategies and preoccupations are symptomatic of a narrative and symbolic problematic that cuts across a wide range of television programs. Finder of Lost Loves is not unique, but is exemplary of impulses and strategies manifested in American television programming in which the formation of couples and families is the product or result of submitting to confessional and therapeutic practices. In this context the therapeutic model, broadly conceived, can be seen as a meta-narrative structure--not the only one, but a significant one--whose effects are manifested in a variety of prime time dramas, soap opera, talk shows, counseling programs, and game shows. Therapy, analysis, and confession are variously evoked as a formative process contributing to the construction of "healthy" "individual" and social subjectivity.

III. The Equalizer

The therapeutic problematic of Finder of Lost Loves is reproduced in The Equalizer but reconstrued in the terms of an urban thriller. In The Equalizer Robert McCall (Edward Woodward) compensates for his past as a CIA operative by applying his skills to help defenseless victims of urban and corporate crime. He deploys the resources of his former profession in a "good faith" effort to rectify situations that cannot be handled through

normal, legal channels. In other words he negotiates his own troubling past--or he lives with himself--through the repetition each case represents: a repetition of methods but applied to different ends, redressing individual social ills rather than instigating political-social disposition. In the process, McCall offers minimal but decisive therapy.

The relationship between McCall's past and present is a central structuring conflict in the episode entitled "Torn" (first broadcast February 12, 1986). McCall becomes involved in a domestic violence case, and is at the same time confronted with the opportunity to capture a former agent who betrayed him in the past. In the course of the show the narrative proceeds in terms of diversions or interruptions, as each investigation impinges on the other, forcing McCall to alternately shift his attention from one to the other and back again. As the episode opens a woman, Jessie Moore, is talking with a police detective about her husband who has been in prison for wife abuse, and is due to be released in one week. The detective explains that a restraining order prohibits Mike Moore from going near his wife and child, but that the police cannot do anything until he actually violates the conditions of his parole. "And by that time we're dead," is Jessie's resigned reply. McCall shows up to meet his client, Jessie's daughter Laura, and assures the Moores that he will be able to provide protection. "Your husband will never hurt you again. Believe me."

In establishing these characters, it is clear that the threat represented by Mike Moore has profoundly affected Jessie and Laura. The detective (a semi-regular character in the series), sympathetic to McCall, provides McCall with background information, explaining that the Moores were married for twelve years before Jessie ever brought formal charges against her husband. Jessie is despairing and helpless, unable to make decisions or act on her own. Laura rarely talks or smiles, although she brings McCall into the case to protect her mother. McCall offers both of them counsel

through the course of the episode. In several scenes he urges Jessie to "go on with her life," to assume control of her own fate. He also talks with Laura about parents, explaining that they are human beings with their own problems, who nonetheless love their children and need their children's love.

As the Moore case develops McCall becomes involved in unofficial business for the "Agency." His assistance is sought by Jason, the brash young director of the Agency's New York City Office. (Jason is also a semi-regular character on the program, and has a continuing, antagonistic relationship with McCall.) Jason explains that a situation has arisen that requires some "housekeeping," one in which McCall has an emotional stake. McCall is initially and predictably irked by Jason's appeal, but changes his mind when he hears that "Bryan" is coming to New York and agrees to help Jason on the case. A black and white flashback quickly establishes McCall's interest in this matter. We see McCall working with a group of children and a woman in a besieged Eastern European city. (The time and place are not identified, but one assumes it is 1948 Berlin, 1956 Budapest, or 1968 Prague.) McCall meets with Bryan who has arranged for a vehicle to transport him to safety. McCall questions the security of the bus and the route suggested by Bryan stressing the importance of protecting Angela from General Mercha and his people. If they get ahold of Angela now, the whole operation will be jeopardized. Bryan assures him that she is being protected. McCall subsequently assembles Angela and the children on the bus, McCall is stopped at an army blockade and beaten up as Angela is dragged off by soldiers.

Back in the present McCall pursues a lead Jason has given him concerning Bryan's New York contact. The meeting is interrupted by a call from Jessie, hysterical because Laura has disappeared. McCall sacrifices his meeting with Bryan's contact to help Jessie find Laura. Later, Jason

catches up with McCall and tauntingly complains about having to do his legwork for him. Jason has discovered that Bryan is already in New York arranging to buy arms. With this information McCall makes plans with his detective friend for the police to arrest the gun dealer. At the same time he learns that Mike Moore's parole date has been moved up, and that Moore will be released from jail within twenty-four hours.

Jason again meets up with McCall and complains about his handling of the Bryan situation. He accuses McCall of scaring Bryan off by arresting the gun dealer prematurely. But McCall insists it is part of his strategy. "You can blindside a man only if he's looking in one direction...[Bryan] will be easier to take now that he's preoccupied." Jason continues to grumble about having to do McCall's work, but tells him that he can still catch Bryan at a heliport in forty-five minutes.

As McCall drives off we see Mike Moore call home from a phone booth and tell Jessie he will be there soon. Jessie tries to call for help but the phone lines are out. McCall gets a call on his car phone from Mike Moore's caseworker informing him that Mike has been released from jail and is late for an appointment. McCall instructs him to call the police, but says that he himself is unable to go directly to the Moore apartment.

McCall arrives at the heliport to wait for Bryan. At this point an asynchronous sound and image montage presents a dramatic condensation of the two cases. Images from the earlier flashback (here in color) are intercut with shots of Jessie, Laura, Jason, and McCall himself in extreme close-up. These images are juxtaposed with Jason's verbal taunts, Bryan's assurances of Angela's safety, Jessie's vocal expressions of concern about Mike, and so forth. This concatenation of past and present culminates in a Repeated shot/reverse-shot construction, with Angela and Laura alternately holding the reverse field position in relation to McCall's gaze. At the end of this sequence McCall gets into his car and drives off, abandoning the meeting

with Bryan.

He approaches the Moore's apartment in time to see Jessie chasing Mike who is running down the street after Laura. As McCall catches up with them, Mike grabs Laura and threatens to jump with her onto a busy highway below a dead-end overlook. McCall convinces him to release Laura and then to step back himself, as the police arrive and arrest Mike, McCall offers a final warning, "When you finally get out I shall be here. It's finished. You do understand that." Jason catches up with McCall in front of the Moore apartment, and offers a disparaging assessment of McCall's work in the wake of Bryan's successful escape. He accuses McCall of being responsible for Angela's death, and says that McCall has finally and completely "lost it." In response McCall suggests that Jason purposefully set him up to kill Bryan. "I don't know why you wanted him dead. Believe me, I will find out."

In the final scene McCall visits with Jessie and Laura in a park overlooking the river. Jessie says she is going to follow his advice about getting on with her life, but is concerned about Laura. McCall goes to talk with Laura who has drawn a picture of her family on a boat. "My Daddy liked ships. He promised he's take me around the world on one. He isn't going to, is he?" McCall assures her that her father will--one day--and that many people are trying to help her father. He also explains that adults often find it difficult to express their feelings directly. He invites her to dinner, picks her up, and the three of them walk off, as the camera reframes Laura's drawing abandoned on the park bench.

In this episode both cases represent disturbances in the domain of interpersonal relations, intersecting in an interplay of repetition and difference, as each becomes the alibi/supplement/displacement of the other. The Moore family is divided within itself between victims--Jessie and Laura--and a victimizer, Mike. Mike's caseworker attributes their problems to

Mike pathological jealousy, expressed in violence towards his wife. McCall intervenes to protect the victims and offers successful counsel to initiate independent action on their part, which also means giving up the traditional nuclear family. In this context McCall offers therapy that enables Jessie and Laura to function as a family unit. For example, in the wake of Laura's disappearance and recovery, as Jessie goes for groceries, McCall talks with Laura, he offers her a lollypop which she silently refuses. In response he launches into a "therapeutic" session, explaining that her mother is not angry, but was very worried and needs her love. He also tells a story about his own son running away years earlier. When they are rejoined by Jessie, Laura immediately gives her mother a kiss, asks if McCall can join them for dinner, and finally accepts the previously-rejected lollypop from McCall. In the final scene of the episode McCall similarly motivates a transformation on Laura's part from isolated passivity to responsive interaction.

McCall thus serves a crucial role as mediator between Laura and Jessie, as well as provoking Jessie to break out of her hysterical panic and to go on with her life. In terms of the therapeutic process it is significant that the idea of "going on with one's life" is repeated in episodes of both Finder of Lost Loves and The Equalizer. It underscores the process of coming to grips with one's past in order to surmount it in the present: that was then; this is now. However, the question of a total cure remains open, insofar as McCall cannot cure the father and restore him to the family (indeed Mike Moore must return to prison), and can himself only hold this position provisionally. In the final scene of the episode he clearly adopts a paterna position in relation to both Jessie and Laura, but the end of the episode terminates his relationship to the Moores, as subsequent episodes elaborate different case histories. Moreover, the Moore situation is only one episode.

Bryan figures as the narrative locus of these conflicts, the former fellow agent who betrayed McCall, and whose unexpected presence in New York offers the opportunity for revenge. As the episode develops, the Moore case and the Bryan case contend for McCall's attention. McCall can either pursue Bryan to avenge Angela's death in the past, or protect Laura and Jessie from Mike in the present. To achieve one of these goals will leave the other situation unresolved, incomplete. Vengeance for Angela will result in a failed commitment in the present, a temporarily displaced repetition of the past which would extend and sustain McCall's sense of guilt. But to focus energy on the Moore case means that Bryan goes free, leaving the past unresolved. The equivalence and tension between the two cases is emphasized in the montage sequence.

The tension of competing commitments is exacerbated in the present by McCall's relationship with Jason. While Jason and McCall are presumably allied--if only on this one case--there are strong parallels drawn between Jason and Bryan as McCall's victimizers. Both of them treat McCall with smug disdain, and are in some sense his adversaries, offering McCall partial, misleading information to turn his work to their own account. In the past Bryan assured McCall that Angela was protected, but in fact sold information to enemy forces so that McCall's effort to lead Angela to safety ended in her death. In the present Jason sets McCall on Bryan's trail on the assumption that a confrontation will result in Bryan's death. McCall can only "go on with his life" in the displaced repetition each case represents; and to successfully resolve his present cases sustains past, unresolved obsessions.

The particular conflict delineated in "Torn" is an effect, and an elaboration of the forces that ground the narrative of the program as a whole. McCall advertises his services as "The Equalizer," and selects cases that involve

underdogs and helpless victims of injustice as a kind of "penance" for his past. This is made explicit in a variety of ways. Early episodes, for example, include information concerning the cases he rejects as well as those he accepts, providing a textually-specific, internal code of logic--a code of honor--governing McCall's "vigilantism." And while he regularly draws on the services of a small cadre of Agency employees with whom he is still friendly to help him in his current work (a pool of semi-regular characters on the program), the established Agency hierarchy and system is repeatedly represented as amoral and corrupt. In this vein one of McCall's regular sources of information is involved in a particularly seamy aspect of Agency business: he monitors diplomats' and politicians' involvement with prostitutes, pornography, and drugs for potential future blackmail. This particular character is also represented as thoroughly enjoying his work, while McCall regularly exhibits disdain towards him, even though he uses him for "underground" operations. While this helps define the moral code that establishes McCall as singular, his situation remains profoundly ambivalent, as he concentrates on his past through repeated extrication on implication in the very sorts of activities for which he is trying to make amends.

IV. A Profusion of Therapy

The Equalizer and Finder of Lost Loves are different kinds of prime time fiction: urban thriller on the one hand and fantasy melodrama on the other. Yet they share an underlying dramatic structure and symbolic problematic in their repeated enactments of a therapeutic cure overseen by a mediating, authority figure. The protagonists in both cases are engaged by clients under the alibi of offering investigative/detective services; and their ability and willingness to

direct a therapeutic cure is determined in direct proportion to their own lack which is specifically delineated in the course of the programs, if not in every episode. This in turn provides a viewer with multiple potential identifications and positions of knowledge in relation to the programs, a dispersion of positions which may be construed in terms of therapeutic discourse as it is rewritten in the course of the shows.

It is crucial to stress the potentiality of these positions insofar as there is no guarantee that any given viewer will recognize/occupy all of them. Individual episodes variably narrates the protagonists' personal stories, which are in turn variably imbricated with the given weekly cases. Thus the availability of "multiple" positions of identification and recognition is itself in flux. However, the delineation of those variable and unstable positions can contribute to the understanding of how television's representation of therapeutic relations impinges not only on dramatic strategies and fictional stories, but also on viewing positions. Or, the therapeutic discourse that traverses these shows is not only part of the programs' "ideological problematic" but is also a constitutive aspect of their "mode of address."⁸

As previously noted in the discussion of Finder of Lost Loves, one cannot simply draw analogies between program regulars/clients, therapists/patients, and television/viewers with the assumption that the former terms unilaterally guide the latter--exercising control over a transformation from instability and incompleteness to fulfillment and resolution--or speak the authoritative and unproblematic voice of dominant ideology. For as the analyses of the programs indicates, such hierarchical control is in some sense immediately challenged by the recognition that weekly "cases" serve as therapy for the program protagonists, as symbolic compensatory repetitions for constitutive lacks (and as

the rationale for their diegetic professions). From this perspective the protagonist is the "true" therapeutic subject who must undergo regulated, interminable repetition. This is reinforced by the programs' narrative structures, a double intersecting therapeutic problematic, one involving program regulars, the other involving the particular client of the week.

This implies a reversal of the binary relations sketched above, whereby clients/patients/viewers guide and control program regulars/therapists/the medium itself. Such an inversion of hierarchy within established terms of division offers an initial challenge to easy assumptions, elect the exercise of power through discourse and yet confirms this power in the complicity of subjects with the discursive terms in which they negotiate or define their positions. At the same time there is a possibility of displacing the terms of this understanding, as viewers may not simple identify with program regulars or a specific client case, but stand "outside" this dynamic in recognition of the doubled therapeutic problematic at the core of the programs. In this instance the viewing position is not construed in terms of secondary, narrative identifications with a particular character (or star) but in terms of the process of therapy to which the characters are subject. I am/can be the "therapist" who recognizes the progress of multiple patients simultaneously, in parallel but uneven development. In the process, the viewer stands in relation to the fiction like the protagonist in relation to his cases. This has the effect of disturbing any simple conceptions about the way in which individuals are aligned with specific positions of power within the therapeutic dynamic, because no one's position is fixed. It nonetheless sustains the established positions and terms of the discourse of therapy.

The possibility of multiple identifications devolving on the viewer moves us

away from understanding these fictions as promoting a fixed perspective on how individuals occupy positions in the social order and in relation to authority. The notion of an absolute, fixed social (and professional) hierarchy is disturbed by the recognition that those figures who most readily occupy the positions one affiliates with power are themselves uneasily situated, and may have to wave aside and allow others--even their subordinates--to assume the functions of authority to guide them back to a position of stability. In this context a seemingly incidental scene in "Torn" in which McCall confers with his maid attains its full significance, he does not embody infallible, brute strength, but is subject to the same doubts, questions, and confusions that plague his clients. In this instance his frustration is directed towards the maid as she vacuums his apartment, disturbing his concentration. In response to his obvious preoccupation she offers a sympathetic and consoling ear, as well as counsel, as he outlines the Bryan situation. McCall exhibits similar moments of distraction, and even depression, in other episodes of The Equalizer, for example when cases in the present too closely resemble his former Agency experience or provoke an extreme and violent emotional response on his part.

The identifications made available in these programs can be understood in terms of the mechanism of fantasy described by Elizabeth Cowie in "Anastasia".⁹ She elaborates on fantasy in psychoanalytic terms, stressing its status as a structure, the staging of desire.

The fantasy depends not on particular objects, but on their setting out; and the pleasure of fantasy lies in the setting out, not in the having of the objects. Within the day-dream and more especially in fictional stories, the demands of narrative may obscure this, for the typical ending will be a resolution of the problems....The pleasure is in how to bring about the consummation, is in the happening and continuing to happen; and not in the moment of having happened, when it will fall back into loss, the past.¹⁰

For Cowie, Fantasy offers a privileged approach to understanding the mobilization of the audience because it engages social reality and the unconscious simultaneously.

What is necessary for any public forms of fantasy, for their collective consumption, is not universal objects of desire, but a setting of desiring in which we can find our place(s). And these places will devolve, as in the original fantasies, on positions of desire: active or passive, feminine or masculine, mother or son, father or daughter.
11

Cowie argues that original or primary fantasy encompasses multiple points of entry "where the subject is both present in the scene and interchangeable with any other character." 13 In relation to this structure (process) of primary fantasy, narrative serves to organize material, like secondary elaboration in dreams.

[Narrative restores] a minimum of order and coherence to the raw material and [imposes] on this heterogeneous assortment a facade, a scenario, which gives it relative coherence and continuity. A holding down, fixing, is performed in the production of a continuity, a coherence; the narrative seeks to find (produce) a proper place for the subject...while subject-positions are variable the terms of sexual difference are fixed. It is the form of tension and play between the fixing of narrative--the secondary elaboration--and the lack of fixity of the subject in the original fantasies which would seem to be important, and not any already-given privileging of one over the other.14

From this perspective viewer identification is not a priori fixed, but is/in flux, mobile across fixed positions. "While the terms of sexual difference are fixed, the places of characters and spectators in relation to those terms are not." 15

The programs I have been discussing conjoin sexual and therapeutic terms of conference (not only male/female, father/mother, son/daughter, but also professional/client, doctor/patient, analyst/analyzed) in the playing out of fantasy through narratives whose trajectories are in the process of a therapeutic

cure. The plots repeatedly engage a familial problematic as characters are encouraged--indeed provoked--to find their place within a family structure. This is achieved in terms of a problem which is symptomatic of disrupted social/personal relations, requiring the services of a third party--a Cary Maxwell or a Robert McCall, for example. The (re)assertion of a stable order is thus accomplished through a process--therapy--which is itself overdetermined by familial relations.

Mobility among these established positions--a limited plurality--is not simply guided by individual "choice" but is worked out in relation to the particular dramatic and narrational perspectives offered in each episode on the one hand, and to the social formation of viewers on the other. Take for example, the narrative and representational conventions that construct sexual, ethnic, or racial difference within television may inflect a particular viewer's mode of engagement with a given episode. Similarly a viewer may assume a specific ideological perspective that overdetermines her response to the program.¹⁶ For present purposes, however, the contours of a specific viewing are less pertinent than the ways in which therapy furnishes a meta-narrative and meta-narrational discourse within television to orient the viewing process.

Through a variety of programs therapy stands as a regime of power and a model of understanding which can be seen as one of television's persuasive ideological forces. From this perspective the ostensible exercise of authority and power within a particular narrative cannot be taken as the sole basis for analyzing television's (re)production of cultural and ideological hegemony. For as I have argued, such positions are subject to continual disruption and reconstrual. Or, while the positions of authority and subordination are fixed in principle, characters functionally move among these positions in practice.

Finder of Lost Loves and The Equalizer may seem to offer "ideal" scenarios in this regard, with an unusual (or even unique) degree of mobility. But in fact an array of programs, including The Love Boat, Remington Steele, and Spenser: For Hire, among others, function along similar lines.

In The Love Boat, for example, the cruise ship staff (the program regulars include the Captain, bartender, photographer, entertainment director, etc.) regularly function as "therapists" for passengers who come aboard with a panoply of familial and romantic problems that are resolved in the space of a weekend. The idea that bourgeois leisure time functions as the context of a cure is prominently repeated from week to week, as various members of the crew offer sympathetic counsel to their guests to promote romantic and familial conciliation. It might seem that the staff serve so well as lay therapists because each crew member already has an established place in the work hierarchy and in the ship's "family."¹⁷ However, this ignores the regular sub-plots centered on the crew members which problemize and reproblemize their status as workers and family members. In both symbolic and literal terms these sub-plots variously involve crew members relations to their co-workers, to their parent/siblings' relatives and to potential romantic partners. In other words, the crew, along with the program's parade of guest stars, are regularly and repeatedly subjected to the therapeutic process at the core of the show.

The narrative premises that found Remington Steele involve a familial problematic in the person of the show's eponymous hero (portrayed by Pierce Brosnan). The question of his identity, cast as a family romance, periodically becomes the focus of narrative attention, as in the two-part 1985-86 season opener, when Steele was in London searching for his identity (=family name). At other times the unresolved question of his identity generates complications in

cases and in Steele's relationship with his partner (and sometime girlfriend) Laura Holt (Stephanie Zimbalist). Like Cary Maxwell and Robert McCall, one can construe Steele's skill as a detective not only in terms of his diegetic con-man (criminal) past, but also in terms of the function of detection as compensation for his lack of knowledge about his own past. 18

It is thus clear that the therapeutic problematic is not limited to domestic melodrama and Aaron Spelling fantasy productions, though both of these offer prominent examples thereof. On the contrary it is central to a program like The Equalizer, an urban thriller that is more frequently discussed in terms of its vigilante-style violence; and indeed encompasses a wide range of dramatic programs. And crucially, even in this expanded context, therapeutic discourse is invoked in the service of the family/couple as constituted the valorized social units. Moreover, in cases where a therapeutic process has been invoked in a television narrative, notably in Aaron Spelling productions such as The Love Boat and Hotel¹⁹, it has been narrowly aligned with the economic and social power interests of a few main characters who authoritatively lead weekly "visitors" in an unproblematic fashion. My analysis insists that the nature of the therapeutic process constructed/represented on television is far more complex and problematic, as an abstracted and multiform therapeutic ideology informs the narrative as a whole, while the association of individual characters with positions of authority/subordination varies: no one is exempt from the force it exerts, and no one definitively or finally controls it.

Therapeutic and confessional modes of discourse have frequently been affiliated with female audiences, especially in forms of melodrama and women's fiction"²⁰ Yet, insofar as they figure as pervasive influences on prime time television in general, we are forced to reconstrue our understanding of therapy,

confession, and therapeutic relations as discourses--in fact an interrelated discursive field--with broader social efficacy. On the one hand the multiplication of the therapeutic problematic within specific programs disperses the positions any single character or viewer may hold, along the lines suggested in the discussion of fantasy. At the same time fantasy--understood in psychoanalytic terms--turns in on itself as it is engaged and worked out in narratives whose underlying problematic involves finding one's place in a familial and social order.

This process is exacerbated with the proliferation of therapeutic discourses through a range of television genres and programs. The potential for a plurality of identifications is balanced in an increased repetition of the same positions with a discourse that overdetermines, and is overdetermined by the family structure. The discourse constrains everyone who participates in it to constantly turn to others in the effort to find their place. This process must itself be repeated over and over again, since one's "place" is never given once and for all, even as the positions one may assume are already given in advance.

NOTES

1. The Kaja Silverman's discussion of Benveniste in The Subject of Semeiotics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 43-53.

2. I am using these terms in the sense developed by Emile Benveniste, "The Correlations of Tense in the French Verb," Problems in General Linguistics, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meed (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press), 205-215.

3. The dialogue in this scene proceeds as follows:

Cary: Go ahead and fight; but you've already lost the girl.
 Mike: What are you talking about?
 Cary: She's packing.
 Mike (to Thad): Was this your idea?
 Cary: No, it was yours, when you decided it was more important to blame Thad for your problems than go on with your life.
 Thad: Now wait a minute Cary. He's got a lot to blame me for.
 Cary: Granted. But he also owes you a lot. You brought Barb here.
 Mike: He cost me my marriage!
 Cary: That was then; this is now. She's always loved you Mike. Do you want to do something about that? Or stay in this rut you've dug yourself?

4. In their final scene Linda asks Evan why he has been so angry. The subsequent exchange emphasizes the "mature-but bittersweet" mutual recognition that they can never get back together. The following dialogue follows directly from Linda's question:

Evan: At our fate. I'm a minister. You're a madam. The only thing we can do...
 Linda: ...is to continue as we are.
 Evan: Well, I'll think of you. And I'll dream of you. And someday you might even find what you're looking for.
 Linda: That I never will.
 Evan: Why do you say that?
 Linda: Because what I am looking for is you.

5. Roland Barones, S/Z, trans. Richard Keller (New York: Wang, 1974), 18-20.

6. In fact, Cary admits that, in general, he holds back expressing his feelings to Daisy--something he didn't do with his wife. "I guess I'm scared if I let go of

one feeling I don't know what other feelings may come tumbling out." He thus defines himself as a prime candidate for a Maxwell, Ltd. cure that he also refuses.

7. In fact the show ended with cancellation after one season in ABC's prime time schedule. However the program is now being sold in syndication, including episodes that were produced but never broadcast during its network run.

8. This distinction is elaborated by David Morely in The 'Nationwide' Audience, (London: British Film Institute, Television Monograph 11, 1980) 139.

9. Elizabeth Cowie, "Fantasy" (1984), 71-104.

10. Ibid., 79-80.

11. Ibid., 87.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 101.

14. Ibid., 102.

15. Ibid.

16. The issue of text/reader relations specifically with regard to television is discussed by a variety of theorists. Among others see Ien Ang, Watching Dallas, trans. Della Couling (New York: Methuen, 1985).

17. An example of this approach to the program can be found in Cathy Schwichtenberg, "The Love Boat: The Packaging and Selling of Love, Heterosexual Romance, and Family," Media, Culture, and Society 6, n.3 (July 1984), 301-311.

18. I do not have space in this context to fully elaborate these perspectives on The Love Boat or Remington Steele. In the latter program the therapeutic/familial problematic focused on the character of Steele is further complicated by the program's self-reflexive/intertextual impulses. A supplemental "history" is offered by the culture industry itself in the form of the movie references that Steele invokes to help make sense of the cases on which he works.

19. For example, see Schwichtenberg, "The Love Boat: The Packaging and Selling of Love, Heterosexual Romance, and Family," and Ellen Seiter, "The Hegemony of Leisure: Aaron Spelling Presents Hotel." Paper delivered at the First International Television Studies Conference, British Film Institute, London, 1985.

20. Among others see Roselind Coward, Female Desires (New York: Grove Press, 1985), especially 135-142 and 175-204; Tania Modleski, Loving With A Vengeance (New York: Methuen, 1984); and Janice Radway, Reading the Romance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).